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The Four Great Military Attacks on Christian Civilization

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— Dr. Dan F. Bradley. — June 16th, 1918.

Text — Acts V: 38. — “Ye will not be able to overthrow them, lest haply, ye be found fighting against God.”

The Kaiser boasts that God is with him. But all history gives the lie to his confidence. If God had been with him he would long ago have been in Paris and controlling the English Channel—and the Suez-Canal—and dictating to America. But God has been against him—defeating his veteran armies — sinking his ships at sea—crippling his allies—and starving his people. If the Kaiser had historical imagination he would see that the experience of all civilization has been contrary to his hope and expectation. For military power is ever fighting against the ideals of Jesus—that is against God—and ideals always prevail because God is with them. For you can destroy armies and spike the cannon and sink the ships—but you can never shoot out of humanity the ideals of Jesus. The Beatitudes cannot be hit by torpedoes. The Golden Rule cannot be gassed out of the world and the Lord's Prayer—goes on doing business when military chieftains are rotting in the memories of men. Let us consider this morning *four* great historical military attacks on Christian civilization.

Christian Civilization as we understand it, began with the preaching of Jesus in Palestine the first century. It was carried by St. Paul to Europe about the middle of that century—it made progress in city centers like Antioch, Alexandria, Athens, Corinth, Carthage and Rome. It finally absorbed the Roman Empire just as that Empire of the Caesars was divided into *East* with a center at Constantinople, and *West* with the old center at Rome. In both these centers the Christian faith became dominant. Christianity absorbed the old Greek and Roman civilizations, and instead of destroying them, made use of them and adapted them. The worship of heathen gods passed away, but the beautiful sculpture, architecture, literature was preserved, although the temples and palaces they once graced had ceased to be pagan. The Emperor Constantine in the famous phrase, *In hoc signo vinces*—surrendered to Chris-

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tianity in the year 312. Following that, Christianity made its way rapidly into Spain, Gaul, Germany, Britain and what is now the Balkans and Austria, and began to organize the fringes of the Roman Empire into something of orderly progress. Schools and churches came together, and Greek and Latin took the place of the native dialects and languages. For a hundred years in spite of local wars, there came to be a real civilization in France, Britain, parts of Germany and what is now Austria Hungary. The Eastern Empire centering at Constantinople grew stronger, the Western Empire centering at Rome grew weaker as its component parts in Spain, Gaul, and the Germanic peoples grew more self-reliant. The old Roman stock was dying out—and Italy was now a mixed race of people with the Goths coming to be dominant in the North, and the Vandals in Sicily and the South. But all these people were gradually coming under the sway of the Christian religion, even though the western Roman Empire itself was about to expire.

It was at this juncture, just when the western world was beginning to shape itself—under the new Christian ideas, that there appeared a wild multitude of Tartar tribes, under the leadership of fierce warriors—the Hun invasion—which swept over nearly all of Europe coming from the East and crossing the Volga river in Russia in the year 350 and driving before them the Germanic tribes, and for 100 years playing havoc with all the foundations and results of civilization. Like grasshoppers sweeping over a wheat field they left a desolation behind them. By the year 450, they had reached Eastern France, having conquered the Slavs, the Goths, the Burgundians—everything north of the Danube, and compelling the Emperor at Constantinople to pay them tribute. Attila was at this time their great king—a man of ugly aspect—but indomitable will and unscrupulous rascality. He laid claim to the Empire of the West and proceeded to take possession of all that his soldiers could seize. The danger to civilization from this inhuman beast was beyond all calculation. Caring for neither books nor art nor ideals of any sort, he turned his wild hordes loose to pillage and loot, and outrage every decent ideal of men. His threat was that of pure savagery, without religious motive, or political principle. But for the sturdy walls of Constantinople which he knew not how to scale—but for the superstitious awe that the presence of Pope Leo gave to his savage comrades, he would have sacked both Constantinople and Rome and destroyed all the centers

of western civilization. At last a Roman General Aetius, for whom all men should be grateful, met his vast army as Chalons Sur-Marne within a few miles of the scene of the German's recent drive—and after a terrible battle in which 300,000 were left dead upon the field—Attila was defeated, his power gradually waned—he himself retired not long after to Buda, now Buda Pesth — and there suddenly died of apoplexy. His great dominion went to pieces—his soldiers and the multitude that followed him vanished away. Within ten years a military power made invincible by 100 years of preparation, came to naught because there was no spiritual motive in it, and in Europe today there is not a single trace of the Hun. The Hungarians are of an entirely different stock, and their name has no connection with the followers of Attila. The damage done by Attila and his savage Tartars can never be computed. They set back the progress of Europe for centuries. The books, architecture, art, they destroyed utterly is incalculable. They broke up organizations and guilds and groups of civilized men—they killed off a great part of European manhood and the recovery from their mutilation was long and tedious.

But Christian civilization survived this brute attack, because it has in it the vitality of youth—and life—and a spiritual upward looking motive and with the passing of the Hun, and the fall of the Western Roman power—there grew up smaller States in what is now France and Spain and Italy. From the North came sturdy races to mingle their blood with the Southerners, Lombards, blue-eyed, penetrating as far as Central Italy, Saxons, from across the Rhine, and Norsemen swarming down the coasts and up the rivers of France, there met the missionaries of the Church, and around the church and Monastery grew cities, with merchants and manufacturers and guilds of skilled men, and horticulture and agriculture were developed. Then came the *second* attack—also military, this time from the South.

When Mohammed let loose his new Arabian scourge upon the world, in the year 622, a part of the forces of Islam went North and East, and conquered Palestine, Syria and Persia and part of India. Another part went west, to Egypt, and Lybia and along the North Coast of Africa clear west to the Atlantic ocean, founding a different sect of Mohammedans—the Moorish division of Islam which has continued until now in the Kingdoms of Morocco and Algiers.

These Arabian warriors absorbing the wild tribes

of the mountains, the Mauretania of North Africa, from which we get the name Moor, began to prepare for wider conquests, and in the year 711 they crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and began a campaign of conquest in Portugal and Spain, and in the year 755 had established the Caliphate at Cordova which lasted for 300 years. But the threat of this Mohammedan power against the Christian civilization of the west reached its culmination in the year 732, when a vast army of Arabs and Moors under the Sultan Abdurahman marched into France, and driving all before it, penetrated as far north as Poitiers within 200 miles of Paris. This was a more dangerous attack than that of Attila, because the Moors had a higher civilization—they had a *religion* that was vital—they had an organization that did not depend upon the life of one man—they had a so-called *culture*—art and architecture and music and poetry were the ornaments of their movement. The Alhambra in Spain shows what they could do in the development of beautiful form. So when they attacked with their vast hordes the divided principalities of France and Italy they constituted a serious menace. If they won France, Britain and by and by Italy would have yielded to the Moor and western civilization would have perished. Once more there arose a commander who met them in battle—Charles Martel by name—and when the battle was over the panic stricken army of the Moors was fleeing headlong across the Pyrenees never to return. The battle of Poitiers in 732 like that of Chalons Sur-Marne in 451, was decisive. Once more it was the sturdy French infantry that stood all day against the fierce attacks of the finest cavalry in the world—Arabian and Moorish. When night fell — the followers of Islam began to fight among themselves—and a panic ensued—so that by morning the Christian army of Charles Martel was astonished to find the enemy vanished and leaving on the field arms and ornaments and tents and trappings and the plunder of many cities. After that Europe became organized under Charlemagne, and the kingdom of France arose to become the splendid bulwark of Christian civilization for centuries.

Thr *third* threat to Western Christian civilization came from another Tartar tribe which had become the leader of Mohammedan faith — the Ottoman Turk. The Arabians and Saracens who were the first of the Mohammedan powers, after their initial successes became quite decent and settled down to a peaceful civilization at Bagdad and Damascus, Aleppo and Alexandria. They had found it even profitable

to have friendly dealing with Christians in the Orient in spite of the Crusades, and about their courts poetry and painting flourished. Then there appeared out of the old savage center of Tartary the tribe of Ottoman Turks who cared for little except plunder, whose single argument was the sword, and who carried fire and blood wherever their fierce regiments marched. They soon became leaders of the Moslems, and attacked the Eastern Empire, destroyed it and made the Black sea a Musselman Lake. Into Russia, Thrace, Bulgaria, Roumania, they penetrated with their armies and swept all before them up the Danube to Vienna—and across the Balkan Peninsula and Greece to the Adriatic. Meanwhile Western Christendom was torn with the strife of the Reformation, and kings and their armies were engaged in fighting religious battles between Protestant and Catholic. The Turk controlled all Eastern Europe and North Africa and his ships swept the Mediterranean Sea, until the Archduke Don John of Spain—destroyed the Turkish fleet at the famous battle of Lepanto in Greece. Under Selim—and finally under Solyman the Magnificent—all Hungary and the Jugo Slavic country was engulfed in the Mohammedan invasion. Only the walls of Vienna stood between the Turk and Germany, Italy and France. At this juncture, there came to the rescue another stalwart soldier—the famous Polish King John III—Sobieski, who with his 20,000 men, came to the rescue of the hard-pressed garrison of Vienna and gained a great victory over the Turk and drove him back into the Balkans and down the Danube. This was in 1683—soon after the settlement of New England. When it is recalled that Vienna is in the very heart of Europe, only 400 miles from Berlin—and 500 miles nearer to Paris or Rome than to Constantinople, it will be seen in what danger all the Western world stood in this threat of the unspeakable Turk. Here again was an unscrupulous military organization bent on plunder and hating the Christian faith prepared to the last degree, and using first of all modern men what was then the most modern weapon—cannon and gunpowder—if it had been victorious would have destroyed every vestige of Christian civilization. But the threat passed, and from that day to this the power of the Turk and the religion that rendered him desperate began to wane.

The *Fourth* great military attack upon the Christian civilization was that of Napoleon Bonaparte at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. His was the most brilliant military and polit-

ical career of any man in all time. Born in a little island of the Mediterranean of Italian stock, he came to be the ruler of all Europe. He carried his victorious armies to Asia and Africa, and placed the crown of an hereditary Empire upon his own head in 1804. In 1807, he was the head of a great confederacy of States which included practically every nation in Europe, all of whom acknowledged his mastery. England alone refused to obey his will, and but for England, he would have ruled in our Mississippi Valley, a region from Canada to Mexico, which he held and afterwards sold to Pres. Jefferson; and possibly, having defeated England, he might have dominated the United States, through his Louisiana possessions.

Napoleon took advantage of the new tide of democracy which had been released by the French Revolution, but which had been discredited by the Reign of Terror. The people of France had been thoroughly awakened by their new liberties, but scoundrels had made freedom a bloody orgy of massacre and confiscation. So when Napoleon came, professing to be a democrat, but guaranteeing good order and personal safety—they followed him. He inherited the new strength of the people—got to the loyalty of the people's armies and turned them to his own selfish ends. The Church also had been almost wrecked by the French Revolution, and he made it a tool of his own materialistic ambitions. Neither fearing God, nor loving men, he was a lonely autocrat proposing to rear a personal empire for personal ends and sacrificed the lives of hundreds of thousands, not only Frenchmen but of Germans, Austrians, Slavs, Italians, Spaniards, Scandinavians, Dutchmen and Arabs. There was an utter lack of conscience in the man, and what he lacked in conscience he gained in a rare and marked intelligence. If ever there was a superman, Napoleon was that superman. He saw through situations as the lightning illuminates the darkness. The political movements of his enemies, their military plans, were as the plans of immature children in the presence of genius. One after another the coalitions of great powers vanished before his mighty strokes, both of politics and of battle. And in the leisure between battles, he had time to codify laws, build great and beautiful cities, cultivate arts and music, and captivate beautiful women. Cruel to his enemies, lavish in his gifts to his favorites, with a power to hypnotize and use good men in his plans—Napoleon was the most dangerous enemy of public morals and the rule of people the world had ever seen until the Kaiser came. His soldiers were willing

to die for his selfish aggrandizement. His bombastic orders were received with multitudinous acclaim. His Court was crowded with learned and gifted sycophants. All the world seemed to be at his feet. All the world except England—and against her he combined all Europe to starve her out and destroy her commerce. But the little Island, with untold sacrifice and marvelous persistence — continued to fight him, until at last the people of Spain, Portugal and of Central Europe rose up and finally destroyed him. If Napoleon had won — then the world had lost its Christian civilization and lapsed into a military paganism, with the forms of Christianity doing honor to the pagan Emperor but with all Christian liberty and ideals discredited and destroyed. But Napoleon came to naught. When he fell—when he was held a prisoner in St. Helena—it was seen plainly by all men—how weak was the structure on which he sought to build a personal military Empire—and how foolish after all, even a genius can be, when he flouts the law of God, and undertakes to put himself on the throne of the world, without conscience and the love of men.

The French who had been leaders of civilization, paid dearly for their Napoleonic obsession. So many of their men were killed in battle that the result was a lowering of the physical stature of all Frenchmen. Through a long hundred years the French have been recovering themselves from the wars of Napoleon. How well they have recovered they are showing to-day in their heroic stand for four long grueling years against the Germans. As France saved civilization at Chalons Sur Marne in 432 against Attila, as she again saved Western Christian civilization in 751 at Poitiers — so she is now saving civilization in Picardy and Champaign, and paying in full the price of her lapse in the days of Napoleon Bonaparte. When this war is over, there will be a France which all the world will salute.

This brief resume of these four historical attacks on the part of military powers against Christian civilization give us encouragement regarding this latest Prussian military attack against our Christian order of society. For there is nothing so clear as that the Kaiser's war is without a shred of a rag of moral excuse to cover its naked savagery. That it is utterly anti-Christian, the cruelties and crimes against innocent women and children, its sacrilege of churches and shrines, and its immoral conduct on land and sea and its barbaric justification of Turkish frightfulness, discloses increasingly. Neither Addurahman, or At-



tila or Solyman were more hostile to the Christian ideals than the Prussian military organization.

And *finally*, it is clear by the testimony of history that Christian ideals are stronger than the most powerful military organization. Neither Attila with his preparation of fifty years, nor Addurahman with the background of 100 years of military success, nor Solyman with the finest army and arms ever assembled up to that time, nor Napoleon with the most wonderful genius—and the best trained army of veterans the world has known could prevail to enthrone military ideals as against the Christian ideals of peace and good-will—though in each case the attack was long prepared for, and the defense was not prepared, but had to be in each case extemporized.

It appears that over the chess-board where justice plays against selfish and cruel might—there is an unseen divine hand moving the pieces upon the board, to check, and checkmate the power of evil.

Attila was defeated by a strange misunderstanding, when sure of victory, Thursimund appeared upon his unprotected flank, and threw his men into a rout.. Addurahman at Poitiers was left undone by the panic of his men at night, when the victory was almost won. Solyman did not count on Sobieski and his gallant Poles, and Napoleon was defeated by the unusual winter in Moscow, and by the appearance of Blucher on the flank at Waterloo, just when the thin red line was wavering. And so it may be that the unlooked for American soldier appearing on the hard-pressed line of French in Champaign may be the pawn in the hand of the celestial chess-player that shall be the undoing of the latest Hun.

At any rate, it is God's world and it is the civilization of Jesus that is threatened, a civilization of good will and justice "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"—in spite of frightfulness and long preparation and bitter cruelty and submarines and poisonous gas—and all the demoniac engines of selfishness. May God hasten the day, when good men, sacrificing everything, may see "of the travail of their souls and be satisfied." The forces of cruelty and greed and oppression cannot win for they fight against God.



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